**The Gift of the Magi –simplified version**

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by always arguing with shop-keepers trying to get the cheapest possible prices. Sometimes her face was red with shame at the thought of what they must think of her. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but throw herself down on the broken little sofa and cry, which Della did.

The flat they lived in cost $8 a week. The furniture that came with it was old and in a poor state. In the entrance area below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button which did not ring. Above the button was a card bearing the name “Mr James Dillingham Young.”

The owner of that name had once been well paid at $30 a week. Now, his pay was $20. But whenever he came home to his flat above, he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by his wife, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her crying and put powder on her face. She stood by the window and looked out without interest. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only $1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, but this was all. Twenty dollars a week doesn’t go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only $1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning to get something nice for him. Something fine and unusual. Something just a little bit near to being good enough to be owned by Jim.

There was a long, narrow mirror between the windows of the room. Suddenly she turned from the window and stood before it. Her eyes were shining brightly, but her face had lost its color. She quickly untied her hair and let it fall.

The James Dillingham Youngs had two things that they were both proud of. One was Jim’s gold watch that had been his father’s and his grandfather’s. The other was Della’s hair.

So now Della’s beautiful hair fell about her, shining like a brown waterfall. It reached below her knee and looked almost like a piece of clothing. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she stopped for a minute and stood still while a tear or two fell on the worn red carpet.

She put on her old brown jacket and old brown hat. With a bright look in her eyes, she ran out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: “Madame Sofronie. Hair Things of All Kinds.” Della ran up the stairs to the first floor and stopped for a moment to rest before going inside. The woman, large, too white, cold, didn’t look like the “Sofronie.”

“Will you buy my hair?” asked Della.

“I buy hair,” she said. “Take your hat off and let me have a look at it.”

Down fell the brown waterfall.

“Twenty dollars,” the woman said, lifting the hair with an experienced hand.

“Give it to me quick,” said Della.

The next two hours flew by quickly and happily as Della looked through the stores for Jim’s present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had looked carefully through them all. It was a platinum watch chain. Simple to look at, its value was measured by what it was made of and not how pretty it looked – as all good things should do. It was even good enough for The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim’s. It was like him. Quietness and value – the description applied to both. She paid twenty-one dollars for it, and came home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim will be able to look at the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it when no one else was looking because of the thin piece of leather that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her happiness gave way a little to care and reason. She went to work trying to make what was left of her hair look as good as possible. In forty minutes her head was covered with tiny curls that made her look wonderfully like a school-boy. She looked at herself in the mirror long and carefully, trying to judge how she looked.

“If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “before he takes a second look at me, he’ll say I look like a dancer in a musical show. But what could I do… Oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At 7 o’clock the coffee was made and the frying pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the meat for dinner.

Jim was never late. Della hid the watch chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his footsteps downstairs and turned white for just a moment. “Please God, make him think I am still pretty,” she whispered.

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor man, he was only twenty-two. And to have to take care of a family! He needed a new overcoat and he had no gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, unable to move. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an look in them that she could not read. It frightened her. It was not anger, or surprise, or disapproval, or horror, or any of the thoughts that she had been prepared for. He simply looked at her in that strange way without moving his eyes away.

Della moved off the table and went to him.

“Jim, my love,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It’ll grow out again. You won’t mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows very fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a nice… what a beautiful, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim, slowly, as if he could not believe his eyes.

“Cut it off and sold it,” said Della. “Don’t you like me just as well, anyhow? I’m still me without my hair, aren’t I?”

Jim looked about the room as if he was looking for something.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of stupidity.

“You needn’t look for it,” said Della. “It’s sold, I tell you… sold and gone. It’s Christmas, Jim. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,” she said with sudden serious sweetness, “but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the meat on, Jim?”

With this, Jim quickly began to act normally. He held Della in his arms, then took a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

“Don’t think the wrong thing, Dell,” he said. “I don’t think there’s anything you could do to your hair that could make me like my girl any less. But if you’ll open that package you may see why you had me going a while at first.”

White fingers quickly tore at the string and paper. And then an excited cry of happiness. Then, sadly, a quick change as only a woman can make to uncontrolled tears.

For there lay The Combs. The set of combs, side and back, that Della had lovingly looked on many times as they sat in a Broadway shop window. Beautiful combs with jewelled edges. Just the color to wear in the beautiful hair that was no longer there. They were expensive, she knew, and her heart had wished for them so much without the least hope of getting them. And now they were hers. But the hair that they should have made more beautiful was gone.

However, she held them to her heart. At last she was able to look up with sad eyes and a smile and say: “My hair grows so fast, Jim!”

And then Della jumped up like a little cat that had some of its hair burned and cried, “Oh, oh!”

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him excitedly upon her open hand. The dull platinum seemed to shine with a reflection of her bright and loving spirit.

“Isn’t it great, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You’ll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.”

But Jim did not give her the watch. He sat down on the sofa, put his hands under the back of his head and smiled. “Dell,” he said, “let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep them a while. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now how about putting the meat on.”

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The Magi were three wonderfully wise men who are said to have brought gifts to the baby Jesus on the day he was born. They gave the first Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts would surely have been wise ones. And here I have told the story of two foolish children who gave up for each other the things they valued most in the world. But in a last word to the wise of these days, let it be said that of all who gave gifts that Christmas, these two were the wisest. And all others who give gifts in the way that they did, are also the wisest. They are the magi.